Careers in languages: Awareness by Grade 12 Tshivenḓa learners in Thembisa, Gauteng

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Authors:
Patricia T. Mphaphuli[1]
Itani P. Mandende[1]
Mashudu C. Mashige[2]

Affiliations:
[1]Department of Applied Languages, Faculty of Humanities, Tshwane University of Technology, Pretoria, South Africa

[2]Faculty of Humanities, Social Sciences and Education, University of Venda, Thohoyandou, South Africa

Corresponding author:
Itani Mandende,
mandendeip@tut.ac.za

Home language learners exhibit negative attitudes towards South African indigenous languages. These languages are perceived as languages that are not beneficial in terms of upward mobility in the workplace. Being aware of the possibilities of studying South African indigenous languages can be a good motivation for learners. A positive attitude towards careers through South African indigenous languages could help to maintain and promote these languages, Tshivenḓa in particular. The study's objective was to explore if learners and teachers from selected high schools in Thembisa, Gauteng province, were aware of careers that can be pursued through Tshivenḓa, and thus to help determine their perceptions towards their home language as a subject at schools. The study adopted a qualitative approach and a case study design that purposively sampled 16 participants. The findings indicated that Tshivenḓa learners are not exposed to possible language careers that can be pursued through South African indigenous languages. On the other hand, the findings revealed that teachers were aware of the possible careers in these languages. This study concluded that research must be undertaken to make high school learners aware of the available language careers in South African indigenous languages.

Contribution: The study closes the gap in career awareness by making learners and teachers in general, and Tshivenḓa L1 learners and teachers in particular, aware of possible careers that exist in South African indigenous language qualifications. The study highlights the need for producing more qualified language practitioners to promote previously marginalised South African indigenous languages and encourage learners to consider pursuing careers in these languages. It also encourages teachers to put more effort into the teaching of South African indigenous languages and for government departments to do more to promote South African indigenous languages by making sure that services are provided to the citizens in the languages that they understand better; as a result, this would create more job opportunities for language graduates, especially regarding the Tshivenḓa language.

Keywords: awareness; language careers; perception; ethnolinguistic vitality theory (EVT); Tshivenḓa learners.

Introduction

The challenge of South Africa's previously marginalised languages, which have been pushed to the periphery of promoting careers in the field of South African indigenous languages, is one of the concerns among learners and teachers of these languages. There have been a few initiatives designed to implement the promotion, development and use of indigenous languages in South Africa by the Pan South African Language Board (PanSALB) and the *Use of Official Language Act No. 12 of 2012*. South Africa previously had 11 official languages, namely Sepedi, Sesotho, Setswana, siSwati, Tshivenḓa, Xitsonga, Afrikaans, English, isiNdebele, isiXhosa and isiZulu, and now the amendments give recognition to South African Sign Language (SASL) as the 12th official language (The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa 1996).

The constitution stipulates that all South African languages should be treated equally and equitably (The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa 1996). Moreover, the *Use of Official Language Act No. 12 of 2012* stipulates that every national department, national public enterprises should adopt a language policy as part of implementing the use of official languages. The Act also stipulates that all official languages should be used for such purposes. A further mandate is given to local municipalities, through the *Local Municipal Systems Act of 2000*, which stipulates that municipalities should provide services in the local languages (*Use of Official Language Act No. 12 of 2012*).

The Green Paper on Post-School Education and Training (2012) highlights some of the major challenges faced by post-school education and training. It argues that the education system still faces historical inequalities where institutions, mostly in rural areas, are disadvantaged in terms of infrastructure, teaching facilities and staffing. On the other hand, while the former whites-only schools, colleges and universities now accept black people, it is unfortunate that black learners are often victims of racism and discrimination, and poorer learners find themselves having to fit in with a system that was designed for learners from relatively privileged backgrounds (Green Paper on Post-School Education and Training 2012:7). These issues are also a challenge in the development of previously marginalised South African indigenous languages, because they are not offered at these schools.

Madonsela (2012) argues that there is a need for intervention in the development and implementation of the language policy for the inclusion of previously disadvantaged South African indigenous languages. Maḑadzhe (2019) states that one of the most disappointing things in South Africa and Africa as a whole has been and continues to be the language used in education, politics, the economy, religion and daily life. Therefore, the establishment of language units in organisations may benefit individuals who pursue qualifications through African indigenous languages.

The PanSALB has established a programme initiative for language development, use and equitability. Two sections under this programme are Dictionary Development and National Language Bodies (NLBs). Dictionary Development aims to continue developing dictionaries in all the official languages, while the NLBs focus on the following:

- Language standardisation: they develop rules and standards, spelling and orthography for the functioning of languages.
- Terminology development: they create conditions for the development and use of terminology, verification, authentication and popularisation of terminology, including management of terminology.
- Promotion of the development of literature: they develop conditions for the preservation and promotion of South African literary heritage and media in previously marginalised languages, including Khoi, Nama, San and South African Sign Language, to ensure accelerated production of literary and media products, inculcation of the culture of reading and providing support to authors, media practitioners, their respective guilds and/or associations, internal and external stakeholders and other role players.
- Language in education: they provide support to the development of teaching and learning materials and curricula in the mother tongue, using historically marginalised languages (oral, written and sign).
- Translation and interpreting: they ensure quality of services (PanSALB 2021:49–50).

The majority of black South Africans believe in the hegemony of English and its socio-economic 'value' at the expense of the use of indigenous languages for educational purposes. This is because of many years of colonisation and apartheid. English is viewed as an international language and the only language capable of creating opportunities for further education and a profitable future (Bamgbose 2011; Kretzer & Kaschula 2020; Magwa 2015; Ndamba, Van Wyk & Sithole 2017). This then puts South African indigenous languages at a disadvantage. The Green Paper on Post-School Education and Training (2012) acknowledges this low status and threat to South African indigenous languages. Hence its recommendation that, to qualify for professional training, learners must be competent in one of the South African indigenous languages. Furthermore, the study encourages learners to take courses in South African indigenous languages as part of their curriculum. Maḑadzhe (2019) recommends that practical measures must continue to be taken to provide better job opportunities in health, science, agriculture and technology for those who have obtained qualifications in South African indigenous languages. Therefore, it is important to merge cultural knowledge with the curriculum, which will bring economic empowerment and create job opportunities for South African language practitioners (Mphaphuli 2021; Khosa 2014:182). A more integrated approach may promote indigenous languages in general from which Tshivenda may also benefit (Mphaphuli 2021:144).

It is anticipated that the problem of learners not taking indigenous languages as a field of study will continue. This is because institutions of higher learning do not emphasise the importance and need to use South African indigenous languages in prestigious domains. The lack of appropriate terminology in these languages is often the reason such languages are not perceived to be suitable for any science education or technology (Kretzer & Kaschula 2020:270).

According to Kaschula and Maseko (2014), the institutions of higher learning have taken a different route to channel the promotion and development of South African indigenous languages to support learning in higher education. The Catalytic Project on Concept Formation in African Languages (2011) was established for South African higher education institutions to collaborate and provide a theoretical framework. The project also aims to implement strategies for the use of South African indigenous languages to encourage conceptualisation in various disciplines, with a focus on those in humanities and social sciences (Department of Higher Education and Training [DHET] 2011). In line with this, universities such as Rhodes University and the University of Cape Town (UCT) have developed African language courses (e.g. isiXhosa and isiZulu) to assist professional communication in different sectors such as Pharmacy, Education, Law, Psychology and Journalism, and learners cannot graduate without passing such mandatory language courses (Hlongwa & Mazibuko 2015; Kaschula & Maseko 2014; Madiba 2010:342).

Unfortunately, even educated and elitist parents in South African communities dispute the idea that children would benefit if their initial education were given in South African indigenous languages (Bamgbose 2000:88; De Klerk & Gough 2002). Maḓadzhe and Sepota (2006) offer a more nuanced analysis of the issue, given that the proportion of high school learners learning South African indigenous languages is decreasing annually. The lack of motivation to study these languages could lead to few or no qualified language practitioners in South African indigenous languages.

High school learners in general are not interested in studying South African indigenous languages because they do not see value in them, especially in job opportunities, when compared with other qualifications that include English. It is against this assumption that this research was conducted at the two selected schools from Thembisa in Gauteng province, because they are the only schools that offer Tshivenḓa as a subject. The exposure to careers that can be pursued through South African indigenous languages for Grade 12 Tshivenḓa learners crystallises the problem that this study seeks to attempt to resolve. One of the requirements from the Constitution of South Africa is that the government must communicate with citizens in the languages they prefer (Zawada, Wallmach & Mabule et al. 2007:5). Hence, there is a need to encourage learners to enrol for a qualification in South African indigenous languages, because it is essential for the promotion and development of previously marginalised languages and demands skilled individuals. In the search for answers to the problem of negative attitudes held towards South African indigenous languages, the following research questions drive the process:

- To what extent are Tshivenḓa learners in the two selected high schools in Thembisa, Gauteng province, aware of careers that can be pursued in South African indigenous languages and where such individuals can be placed in the work environment?
- What is Tshivenḓa learners' perception of language professions in the two selected high schools in Thembisa, Gauteng province?

Theoretical framework

The research is underpinned by the ethnolinguistic vitality theory (EVT) proposed by Giles, Bourhis and Taylor (1977). Giles and colleagues (1977:306) define EVT as 'that which makes a group likely to behave as a distinctive and active collective entity in intergroup situations'. Ethnolinguistic vitality theory is divided into three categories, namely demography, institutional support and status. Demography refers to the number of people who speak the same language, while institutional support is the extent to which an ethnolinguistic group enjoys formal or informal support in and control over the various institutions of a community, region or nation. Status refers to how a language is perceived by individuals, whether it is seen as a language spoken by people of high or low status and/or educated or not. The research focuses on 'status' and 'institutional support'

under EVT. The status aspect is concerned with individuals' perception of a particular language to gain status. Fishman (1972) is of the view that the more speakers a language has, the higher its status and the greater its vitality, as well as its chance of survival. Giles and colleagues (1977:308) further support this by arguing that ethnolinguistic minorities with little or no group vitality would eventually cease to exist as distinctive groups. In essence, it is unlikely that learners would show more interest in previously marginalised languages, which at the moment hold a lower status.

The best way to maintain the language of the community is through the transmission of the language by parents to their children (Fishman 1991). It is thus imperative for parents and teachers to teach and show children the importance of the promotion and development of South African indigenous languages, as this motivates learners to display a favourable perception of such languages. In other words, if learners are aware that their languages, Tshivenḓa in particular, can be used in business, science, politics and government, they would likely want to enrol for qualifications in such languages.

Institutional support is an essential part of this research topic. This study focuses on the usage of language in different places for its survival. According to Giles et al. (1977), all forms of formal and informal use of South African indigenous languages, as well as control by various government institutions in religious, educational, political, media, business, and cultural contexts, contribute to institutional support and overall vitality. When a language is institutionally supported, more people strive to be associated with it to enjoy its benefits. In support of this, Mphaphuli (2021) states that one of the many ways to empower, for example, traditional song performers in terms of business is by allowing them to participate in musical performances sponsored by government and nongovernmental organisations. For example, in the Vhembe district of Limpopo, there is visibility of the use of previously marginalised languages, as is seen in the Department of Health publications, which are only written in Tshivenḓa (Kaschula & Maseko 2014). Accordingly, this creates a favourable attitude among the community because they can see that their language is used and institutionally supported. In other words, additional job possibilities for language practitioners will be created when the government shares information and services in South African indigenous languages. This will enable many sectors, including government departments and the corporate sector, to support and promote South African indigenous languages.

Literature review
The language situation in South African schools

In 1948, when the National Party (NP) came into power, the education system and language policy were accompanied by 'racial criteria' through the *Bantu Education Act No. 47 of 1953* (Kretzer & Kaschula 2020:259). This Act significantly excluded South African indigenous languages from the

education system. However, during post-apartheid, South Africa welcomed a new constitution (1996), which helped to introduce the *South African School Act (SASA) of 1996* (Department of Education [DBE] 1996). This Act gives authority to the School Governing Bodies (SGBs) – a group that consists of parents, teachers, nonteaching staff and learners – to improve teaching and learning by fostering the well-being and productivity of the school community (DBE 1996; Ramothwala, Mandende & Cekiso 2022). This statutory body determines which languages should be used as languages of learning and teaching (LoLT) in their schools (DBE 1996). The languages and subjects chosen by the SGBs indicate how they will be used in administration or in public, demonstrating that the majority of schools are democratic (Kretzer & Kaschula 2021:110). Following this, the SGBs have the power to influence learners and communities to use and promote South African indigenous languages through their language policy decisions.

In 1997, the government adopted a new Language in Education Policy (LiEP) (Department of Education [DBE] 1997) which aimed at promoting multilingualism and developing all the official languages to ensure that home languages (South African indigenous languages) are maintained, as well as to develop programmes for the redressal of previously disadvantaged languages (DHET 1997). The policy empowered South African minority languages, such as Tshivenḓa, in creating a significant space for the promotion and development of languages in the educational environment. Hence, learners need to understand the importance of learning their home languages.

In most secondary schools, learners are required to select subjects of their choice. For instance, in South Africa, Grade 9 learners are required to choose major subjects that they would like to study the following year in Grade 10. According to the DBE (2019), learners must have seven subjects – four compulsory and three non-compulsory – which are chosen at the end of Grade 9 for Grades 10–12, to obtain the National Senior Certificate in Grade 12. The four compulsory subjects include two official languages (one Home Language and one First Additional Language), Mathematics or Mathematical Literacy and Life Orientation.

The process of selecting subjects is one crucial decision that learners must make, because it determines the field of study they can follow once they have completed Grade 12. While learners in public schools may have distinct reasons for choosing their subjects, continuing with their home language is compulsory (DBE 2019). As learners are required to study their home languages, the question arises whether they view South African indigenous languages as beneficial to their future careers. It is anticipated that if learners are not aware of opportunities that come with studying South African indigenous languages, it is highly unlikely that they would be interested in furthering their studies in those languages.

It is pointless for learners to learn various languages if they are unable to understand how to apply the knowledge to real-life situations. Caine, Caine and Crowell (1994:98) assert that 'to make learning meaningful, it must be tied to learners' experience'. This suggests that learning may not be purposeful if learners do not understand the connection between the language subject they are being taught and how they can use it to benefit or empower themselves outside the classroom situation.

Moreover, Mutie and Ndambuki (1999) observe that many learners wish to study or pursue various language career paths but do not know what the careers entail, or which subjects are important to pursue careers in language. It seems that career guidance offered in schools is often insufficient. Johnson (2000) concurs with Mutie and Ndambuki (1999) that most learners have limited understanding in terms of how school relates to the real world and show a lack of knowledge and skills to succeed in their future. Similarly, this could result in learners studying their home language merely because it is compulsory, and they might find limited future employment opportunities. If these cases are not addressed early, little or no effort would be invested in mastering the language.

Learners do not take South African indigenous languages seriously as they are unaware of the potential for employment in these languages. This is supported by Bamgbose (1991), who states that one of the reasons individuals do not want to study South African indigenous languages is the perception that there is a lack of need for these specialists in the job market. While most post-secondary education programmes do not necessitate passing a South African indigenous language course, it is a useful skill in the business sector.

Pule (2014) and Mphaphuli (2019) further buttress this point by arguing that careers pursued through indigenous languages are not fashionable compared to those pursued or performed in English. It is also evident that those few learners who are exposed to language careers are only familiar with careers such as translating, interpreting, language editing and teaching. In fact, there are job opportunities for graduates in South African indigenous languages such as teaching, language practice, translation and interpreting, writing and publishing (Maḓadzhe 2019). Therefore, it is important to 'dispel the fear that acquiring quality education in African languages would not allow for resultant sustainable employment' (Maḓadzhe 2019:207).

Pursuing careers in South African indigenous languages

Language is crucial and a central feature of culture that makes it possible for a culture to be transmitted, interpreted and configured. A language is a carrier of a culture (Prah 2006). When individuals pursue careers through South African indigenous languages, this means that their cultures will be indirectly preserved, and their dignity is maintained. Unfortunately, many South African indigenous languages have restricted roles in public because of their low status. This could be the reason why they are not seen as useful and individuals do not pursue careers in them. Bamgbose (2011)

observes that one of the reasons why South African indigenous languages are accorded a lower status is because they require more development and use in larger contexts. Many people who are supposed to lead on this matter, such as politicians and linguists, just pay lip service to this matter with no tangible, actionable and impactful plans in place (Kaschula 2004:11). Similarly, Bamgbose (2011) asserts that most elites and parents in the lower social groups take their children to schools where South African indigenous languages are not regarded as a medium of teaching and learning, and where these subjects are not even part of the curriculum. Accordingly, there is a greater need for qualified language specialists to be produced, and this could only be achieved if learners are also made aware of the importance of their languages. The awareness and interest in language-related job opportunities could close the gap in society and work and/or industrial environments.

As the South African unemployment rate continues to escalate, individuals find themselves posing questions such as the following: what is the best career for one to pursue, and/or will they be able to find employment once they have completed their studies? These questions cannot be avoided now. While research shows that most people hold negative attitudes towards South African indigenous languages (Kretzer & Kaschula 2020; Magwa 2015), it is in contrast to what the industries think. According to Texiera (2004) and Cere (2012), different sectors seek language experts because they provide effective communication and language skills, which contributes to the success of any organisation. This is supported by Fitzgerald (1993), who confirms that language skills are now becoming the centre of attention in the global environment. The following question arises: are learners aware of these global demands?

In light of the foregoing, it is important to encourage individuals to acquire the skills needed in the market if they want to pursue language as their career (Bloch 1995). In other words, for one to be regarded as a language expert, their competency, linguistic ability and cross-cultural competence must be at a higher level. As such, it is crucial to know where one can acquire those skills.

Skilled translators, interpreters, lexicographers, terminologists and speech therapists, to mention a few, are needed everywhere, from the government to hospitals to courts of law. For this line of work, a high level of proficiency in the relevant languages is necessary, and specialised training is required. According to Afrilingo (2022), South African indigenous languages can be used in different spheres: in business, for instance, to penetrate the South African markets, one needs to communicate with the customers in their languages to win their hearts. Afrilingo (2022) further observes that business documents such as employment contracts, marketing materials and policies need to be carefully translated to avoid unnecessary legal issues.

The PanSALB Annual Performance Plan 2021/2022 proves that South African indigenous languages can function in different sectors. The analysis conducted by PanSALB highlights the following factors that affect the use and development of South African indigenous languages:

- Political factors: the apartheid oppression of South African indigenous languages transformed such languages and multilingualism into a politically emotive matter.
- Economic factors: private institutions such as banks use translation to attract clients (they have language choices when transacting).
- Social factors: the use of English in many domains makes it difficult to promote South African indigenous languages.
- Technological factors: while technology was introduced in English, there are, however, opportunities for translation.
- Legal factors: most people do not understand laws that apply to them because they are in a foreign language; hence, there is a need to develop previously marginalised languages within the legal context (PanSALB 2021:39).

Research methodology

This study adopted a case study design. This design helped the researchers to avoid over-generalising the findings of this study (Ashley 2012; Geertz 1973). The study employed the qualitative approach, which provides a deep and 'holistic' overview of learners' exposure to language careers, which often involves engaging with the everyday lives of individuals, groups or communities (David 2014:160). This approach was appropriate for our research since it allowed us to acquire a thorough understanding of the phenomenon under investigation by interpreting the data based on what we could see, hear, and interpret rather than isolating the the individuals' experiences or backgrounds (Creswell 2007). Face-to-face semistructured interviews were deemed suitable for this study to collect qualitative data from both learners and teachers. This type of interview does not follow any order of questions, as these may change depending on the direction the interview takes (David 2014). Interviews were conducted after school hours so as not to disrupt normal school functions and for ethical reasons. The interviews were recorded, transcribed and later sorted to develop similar patterns, which were grouped into themes.

Sampling

The sample consisted of 16 participants from two South African public high schools. The two schools were selected because they are the only two schools in Thembisa, Gauteng province, that teach Tshivenḓa as a subject. Twelve Grade 12 Tshivenḓa L1 learners, six from each school, and four teachers, two from each school, who teach Tshivenḓa as a subject were purposefully selected. We used purposive techniques to ensure the sample included Tshivenḓa-speaking Grade 12 learners and their teachers. This sampling technique is best suited as it is based on the researchers' judgement as to who is likely to provide the required information to achieve the objectives of the study (Kumar 2014). Table 1 provides the social demographic details of the participants.

TABLE 1: Participants' socio-demographic information.

Description	Male	Female
Learners	6	6
Teachers	2	2

Data analysis

The thematic method was used to analyse data. Saldaña (2016) observes that pattern coding is another outcome of thematic analysis that entails combining excerpts with associated codes under a single overall code (Saldaña 2016). To analyse the qualitative data, the researchers coded the collected data and grouped the data into categories of themes. Interview transcriptions were coded through interpretation and division of 'meaningful analytical units' (Nieuwenhuis 2016:116).

Discussion of the main findings

This section presents findings and discussions derived from the collected qualitative data. Three major themes emerged from this research, namely:

- Theme 1: awareness of careers pursued in South African indigenous languages.
- Theme 2: government's role in creating employment opportunities for language practitioners.
- Theme 3: the perception towards language professions.

Theme 1: Awareness of careers pursued in South African indigenous languages

This study aimed to assess whether Tshivenḓa learners in public high schools at Thembisa township from Gauteng province are aware of possible careers in South African indigenous languages. The findings show that learners are not aware of the available careers in South African indigenous languages, as indicated by a majority of 16 learners. This finding is in line with responses from the Tshivenḓa teachers, who also pointed out that learners are not aware of careers in South African indigenous languages. Some learners confirmed that more than 80% of the learners were not aware of careers in South African indigenous languages. The most common course that they were familiar with was teaching, majoring in languages:

> 'Wow, I did not even know that one can study language at a university.' (17 years, male learner)

This finding is consistent with that of Pule (2014), who also found that while there are many careers in South African indigenous languages, they are not as popular as those pursued in English.

Teachers were of the view that it is impossible to expect learners to pursue Tshivenḓa as a career when they are not even aware of Tshivenḓa language careers in which training is offered at universities. The findings of this study further show that the only way for learners to become aware of language careers is by having language experts from different institutions of higher learning visit schools, informing learners about language courses and encouraging them to pursue such careers. This result also corroborates Pule's findings (2014), where participants were willing to promote language professions by recommending people who might not know about language courses and encouraging those who are interested in languages to enrol in language courses.

The findings also support Mphaphuli's argument (2021), as well as that of Khosa (2014:182), that there is a need for university scholars to merge cultural knowledge into the curriculum, which will bring economic empowerment and create job opportunities. According to Mphaphuli (2021:144), integrating Tshivenḓa languages will increase enrolment rates, which are currently low compared to Xitsonga, Northern Sotho and other languages.

Most learners are not aware of which careers they can venture into with the subjects they are studying at school and how they can tie what they are learning to real-world needs, especially in the work environment (Mutie & Ndambuki 1999; Johnson 2000). To support this view, one learner said, 'I think such careers should be included in our curriculum for teachers to teach us about them. I do not think even our teachers are aware of these careers, so this will also help them.' (18 years, female learner).

One contradictory finding was that while learners were not aware of language careers, they were, however, familiar with places where those who pursue careers in languages could work, even though they were not sure whether there were many job opportunities for language practitioners, especially in Tshivenḓa. This rather contradictory finding is because of learners imagining the different kinds of services that could be provided in the workplace by Tshivenḓa speakers who are not linguists.

Theme 2: Government's role in creating employment opportunities for language practitioners

One finding indicates that the majority of learners and all teachers felt that the government lags in terms of providing employment opportunities in South African indigenous languages such as Tshivenḓa. They were of the view that the government can do better to implement the existing National Language Policy Framework and *Use of Official Language Act No. 12 of 2012*. By so doing, more job opportunities would be available nationally, provincially, locally and within state-owned enterprises such as Eskom, South African Airways (SAA), Denel and Telkom, to mention but a few, for qualified language practitioners and linguists.

In tandem with the present findings, the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (1996) stipulates that every national department, national public entity and national public enterprise should adopt a language policy as part of implementing the use of official languages (Constitution of the Republic of South Africa 1996). By doing so, attitudes

towards South African indigenous languages and use of these languages at government level would change, and people would see their value. Ultimately, their status would improve, as they would be used by government institutions and other national public entities. This is what EVT advocates for. Languages that are not recognised and used at official levels tend to evoke negative attitudes from the public, as they are seen as languages of no value that are not taken seriously in major domains of life. Consequently, these languages may die (Giles et al. 1977).

Although it is clear that certain initiatives are taking place, notably in the higher education sector, the findings also show that more work remains to be done to develop and promote South African indigenous languages. A couple of South African universities such as the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Cape Peninsula University of Technology and the Universities of Limpopo, Cape Town, University of South Africa (UNISA), Free State and Fort Hare have departments that offer language courses, and they are also implementing strategies to use indigenous languages in various domains (Hlongwa & Mazibuko 2015; Kaschula & Maseko 2014).

Similarly, in the Limpopo Vhembe district, there is linguistic landscape visibility, as evidenced in the Department of Health publications, which are only written in Tshivenḓa (Kaschula & Maseko 2014). In other words, such support from the government creates more job opportunities and promotes South African indigenous languages.

Theme 3: The perception of language careers

The findings also demonstrate that participants felt that language professions in South Africa were not taken seriously. The majority of learners interviewed indicated that much of the exposure is to science and technology courses rather than language courses. Similarly, all teachers interviewed expressed concerns about the fact that language careers are not taken seriously as compared with other careers. One teacher expressed:

> 'Our career is seen as worthless, unqualified people are employed to do language-related jobs. For example, an engineer can never be employed to perform duties of a medical doctor, similarly, a person who is not qualified to be a language practitioner should not be expected to perform duties of a language practitioner.' (52-year-old, female, teacher)

This is also underscored by Maḓadzhe and Sepota (2006), who assert that more attention is given to courses that are seen to yield immediate financial benefits. The findings suggest that people think that language careers are not useful; hence, learners are not inspired to pursue them. Giles et al. (1977) posit that if a language is not supported institutionally, that is, by government departments and agencies, its speakers will not see value in using it. Therefore, the government and its agencies should support the functionality of these languages through legislative frameworks that are practically implementable.

In contrast to this finding, there are quite a few initiatives in place in terms of promoting, developing and creating employment in South African indigenous languages. For example, universities such as Rhodes University and UCT offer South African indigenous language courses (e.g. isiXhosa and isiZulu) to assist professional communication in different sectors such as Pharmacy, Education, Law, Psychology and Journalism. In some instances, learners may not graduate without passing that language course (Madiba 2010; Kaschula & Maseko 2014; Hlongwa & Mazibuko 2015).

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to explore if learners and teachers from two selected high schools from Thembisa in Gauteng province are aware of careers in language professions, Tshivenḓa in particular. As far as the primary question (viz., 'To what extent are Tshivenḓa learners and teachers in the two selected high schools in Thembisa, Gauteng province, aware of careers that can be pursued in South African indigenous languages and where such individuals can be placed in the work environment?'), it was concluded that learners are not aware of the current language careers that can be pursued in South African indigenous languages. Similarly, the teachers believe that the government can do better to implement the existing National Language Policy Framework, and by doing so, more job opportunities will be available for qualified language practitioners and linguists when language units are established in various departments – nationally, provincially and locally. As for the second question (viz., 'What is Tshivenḓa learners' perception towards language professions in the two selected high schools?'), both learners and teachers expressed concern that language professions were not treated equally with other professions.

According to the findings of this study, learners from two public schools in Thembisa, Gauteng province, have negative views about South African indigenous language careers in South Africa due to a lack of exposure to these professions. It is therefore recommended that more awareness campaigns be organised within schools so that learners are made aware of careers in language fields very early in their schooling years.

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Authors' contributions

P.T.M. wrote the article and I.P.M and M.M. reviewed, revised and finalised it.

Ethical considerations

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Data availability

The authors confirm that the data supporting the findings of this study are available within the article.

Disclaimer

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